

## ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** January 9, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Keep Cool Hills Management Area

**Division/Bureau:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

### **Background**

This proposal would extend for two years, through F&W Commission rule, a 15,000-acre cooperative management area north of Lincoln that was established by commission rule in 2007. Sieben Ranch Company owns most of the land, with some parcels owned by the Montana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. A portion is State Land, administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The cooperative management area rules would provide for managed public access throughout the year. Prior to 2006, unmanaged public access resulted in significant resource damage to lands in this area, causing affected landowners to consider closing the area to public access.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

**May 9, 2006**—FWP met with landowners to discuss ideas for a possible management plan—approximately eight members of the public (local recreationists) participated in the discussion, expressing concern about how traditional use of the lands might be affected.

**August 23, 2006**—Public information meeting in Lincoln where some opposition was voiced from local recreationists who had traditionally used the area with no management plan in place.

**May–December 2006**—Interim Management Agreement implemented under FWP's Special Access Project to provide managed public hunting access during the 2006 hunting season. Public education through maps and information kiosks helped explain rules and rationale. Some vandalism of signs and gates occurred. Overall public reaction to changes implemented in 2006 was mixed, with some people resisting changes and others welcoming them. Affected landowners and FWP staff were pleased with results of initial season.

**March 2007–December 2013**—Keep Cool Hills Management Area in place, with no complaints received from public recreationists or affected landowners. Public comment received during the 2012 biennial rule renewal process was very much in support of the proposal, the 2012 comments are attached.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Without adoption of this proposal, Sieben Ranch Company may close lands under its control to public access. DRNC and TNC lands are already subject to the management rules included in this proposal.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP proposes the commission approve this proposed rule. Managed public access will reduce resource damage which has previously occurred, while allowing FWP to work in partnership with the landowners to provide the public with a significant amount managed recreational access to high quality lands.

### **Proposed Motion**

Recommend approval of Keep Cool Hills Hunting Access and Recreation Management Area Biennial Rule.